

Two-year-olds still to access free nursery care - data ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Three out of 10 of the most dis-advantaged two-year-olds earmarked for free childcare on a flagship scheme are yet to access a place, figures show.

Ministers pledged 15 hours a week of free childcare to 130,000 two-year-olds in England from September.

But the latest Department for Education data shows while 92,000 children are receiving such care, 38,000 are not.

Childcare providers said the offer, which was heralded by the deputy prime minister, was not properly funded.

Neil Leitch, chief executive of the Pre-School Learning Alliance, said at a time when many providers were still underfunded for the existing free nursery place scheme for all three- and four-year-olds, it was vital that the government makes sure the two-year-old scheme is adequately funded.

"This will determine the success of the initiative and the positive impact for generations to come.

"While the latest take-up figure is extremely positive, we need to ensure that there is a long term strategy of continuous support in place to ensure that all participating providers are able to offer high quality, appropriate care and education."

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The scheme has struggled to find enough free childcare places for disadvantaged two-year-olds, often because nursery provision tends to be in more affluent areas where the disadvantaged children being targeted do not live. Also places have to be in settings rated good or outstanding by Ofsted.

In May, the BBC News Website reported that the scheme was 55,000 places short, and there were warnings that it would not open fully in all areas, with shortages predicted in London and other urban areas.

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The department is due to expand the scheme to 260,000 children in England next September.

Childcare workers association Pacey, which represents many childminders, welcomed the fact that, so far, 70% of eligible families had signed up to receive the free entitlement for childcare.

But it said it was concerned that the government had already noted that in some areas it might not have enough providers rated good or outstanding to cover all the children entitled to the two-year-old offer, and would have to use providers graded as requiring improvement.

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- reprinted from the BBC

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